
Downham Rural District Council.

ANNUAL REPORT

OF

The Medical Officer of Health,

FOR THE

Year ending December 31st, 1899.

THE PRIORY,
DOWNHAM MARKET,
February 23rd, 1900.

**To the Chairman and Members of the Downham Rural
District Council.**

GENTLEMEN,

I have much pleasure in presenting you with the Annual Report of the Sanitary conditions and of the work done during the past year in this District.

Generally speaking the health of the District has been very good during the past year. In 1898 I reported "Impetigo Contagiosa" a skin disease with a pustular eruption. This is still running its course through various villages. When it first appears in any school the scholars affected ought to be immediately excluded. School grants ought not to be lowered by such exclusion as I think that this method of dealing with all sorts of epidemics preferable to school closure, as interfering less with scholastic work.

Sanitary Work of
the Year.

Examination of the Journal of Sanitary Inspector for the year shows—

- 14 Privies repaired
- 33 New Privies
- 21 Foul Privies cleansed
- 4 Dirty Houses cleaned
- 10 Houses repaired
- 19 cases of Drainage put in order
- 9 cases of Overcrowding dealt with, of which
 - 1 obtained a fresh house
 - 2 left the District in vans overcrowded
 - 1 hired part of adjoining house
 - 5 made satisfactory arrangements
- 34 houses provided with a suitable Water Supply, and several notices not yet complied with, in some cases owing to the difficulty of getting labour
- 160 other Nuisances of various kinds have been abated.

In Hilgay the Sewers were thoroughly flushed in June.

The Welney School was fumigated in January, and the Southery School in March.

Some defect in the drainage of the school at Salter's Lode having been pointed out to the School Board, immediate steps were taken to rectify the same, and the drains are now in a very satisfactory condition.

From the above list it will be seen that a good deal of work has been accomplished during the past year. Your Inspector and myself have made several visits to the various parts of the District.

Overcrowding

Nine cases of Overcrowding have been dealt with. There still remains much to be done in this direction. Many houses, especially in the Fen district, are quite unfit for human habitation; but as I have before pointed out it is impossible at present to deal with any but the more glaring cases. Many of these houses are much too small, are badly lighted, damp and have very imperfect roofs. Every year such houses necessarily become more dilapidated, especially when they belong to small owners, as so many do.

Water Supply

In 1890 a special report on the Water Supply in the Fen District was laid before you by the then Medical Officer of Health. This report was called for by the number of cases of Typhoid Fever which had occurred in the District. Particular stress was laid upon the fact of the pollution of the river Ouse.

Since that report was issued the Water Supply has been greatly improved by the erection of tanks for storing rain water, and the result is that the number of cases of Typhoid Fever has been greatly reduced. During the past year there has not been a single case due to drinking polluted river water.

The river Ouse drains a large area of this District, and in various parts of its course receives tributaries, all of which are more or less subjected to pollution. For instance at Salter's Lode it receives the water from the Wisbech Canal into which is emptied the sewage of the villages on its banks. And lower down the St. John's Eau which receives the sewage of the Downham Urban District. And then the Ouse itself outside this District receives pollution from various causes, probably among others from the Ely sewage.

There is of course a great deal of fresh water poured into this river which no doubt minimises to a large extent the evils of polluted river water. Nevertheless there must always be a certain element of danger if the water is used for drinking purposes. For in spite of all warnings and even the supply of tanks there are always some people who will wilfully do so.

As will be seen from the Journal of the Inspector the erection of tanks where required is being steadily proceeded with.

In the upland district the water supply is generally fairly plentiful, but owing to the nature of the subsoil, the shallowness of the wells, and in some cases the close proximity of cess pools, ash pits, and farm yards the water is often impure. I have inspected many wells and analysed samples of water, and where I have found it necessary to condemn these a purer supply has been procured. The water of many wells would also be greatly improved if the latter were periodically cleaned out.

Zymotic Diseases. The total number of cases of Notifiable Infectious Diseases occurring in the district during 1899 was only 35.

This number compares very favourably with 58 in 1898, and still more so with 140 in 1897.

TABLE A.

DISTRICT.	Scarlet Fever.	Typhoid.	Diph- theria.	Erysipelas	Puerperal.	Totals.
DOWNHAM DISTRICT—						
Denver ... ..	...	...	...	1	...	1
Southery ... ..	...	...	2	1	...	3
Barroway Drove	1*	...	...	...	...	1
Salter's Lode ... ..	...	...	...	1	...	1
Welney	16	...	4	...	...	20
WIGGENHALL DISTRICT—						
St. German's ... ..	...	...	...	1	...	1
Holme ... ..	...	...	...	1	...	1
St. Mary's... ..	...	...	...	1	...	1
Watlington... ..	...	1*	...	3	...	4
FINCHAM DISTRICT—						
Marham ... ..	...	1*	...	...	...	1
Stoke Ferry ... ..	...	1	...	...	...	1
	17	3	6	9	...	35

* IMPORTED.

From the foregoing Table it will be seen that with the exception of Welney there were very few cases throughout the rest of the District. .
The following Table will show the prevalence of these diseases throughout the various months of the year :—

TABLE B.

MONTHS.				Scarlet Fever.	Typhoid.	Diph- theria.	Erysipelas.	Puerperal.	Total.
January	...	...	...	14	...	...	...	...	14
February	...	...	...	...	...	...	2	...	2
March	...	...	...	2	1	2	2	...	7
April	...	...	...	...	...	...	2	...	2
May	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
June	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
July	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	1
August	...	...	...	1	...	...	1	...	2
September	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	1
October	...	...	...	...	...	...	1	...	1
November	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
December	...	...	...	...	...	4	1	...	5
Totals				17	3	6	9	...	35

The following Table compares the number of principal Notifiable Infectious Diseases during the past four years :—

TABLE C.

Year.	Scarlet Fever	Typhoid.	Diphtheria.	Erysipelas.	Puerperal.	Totals.
1896	49	7	28	13	1	98
1897	97	11	16	15	1	140
1898	9	4	34	10	1	58
1899	17	3	6	9	...	35

Diphtheria

There were six cases of Diphtheria reported. Of these 2 cases occurred at Southery, and both proved fatal. Measures were promptly taken to ensure isolation and disinfection, and it is very satisfactory to find that no further cases occurred in that village. And the same may be said of the remaining four cases that were notified in one day at Welney. These latter were, I believe, of a very mild type. But I often find that outbreaks like these, even if mild at the onset, become much more severe if they remain unchecked.

Scarlet Fever

In January there was an outbreak of Scarlet Fever at South Welney. There was some little delay in the notification of the outbreak, which no doubt contributed to the spread. No cause for the origin could be ascertained, but as Scarlet Fever was prevalent in the adjoining District, it is very possible that it was brought into our District. On having the School

thoroughly disinfected and cleaned out, and as far as possible isolating the patients, the disease was soon stamped out.

The case that occurred at Barroway Drove acquired the infection from a visitor who had recently come from an infected house in Nottingham. This case was a particularly interesting one, inasmuch as it occurred in the School-house at Barroway Drove, and the patient was a teacher in the Wimbotsham School. Fortunately, owing to the very strict precautions that were taken, there was no further spread of the disease.

Typhoid There were only 3 cases of Typhoid Fever. Two of these clearly acquired the disease outside this District. In the other case, at Stoke Ferry, nothing in the surroundings of the patient could be discovered to account for the disease. There were no cases in the Fen District.

Erysipelas Erysipelas is always present in the District. Glancing at Table C, it will be seen that there is very little variation in the number of cases annually reported. The cases are always of a sporadic nature.

Tuberculosis In my Report for 1898 I drew your attention to the ravages of this disease. During the past year there have been 21 deaths from Phthisis or Tuberculosis of the Lungs alone, which means that out of every 100 deaths 8·3 are due to this disease. And there is not the slightest doubt, too, in my own mind that our infantile mortality, which is very high, is increased by the tubercle bacillus, which is probably conveyed to their systems by the milk supply. The death rate from Tuberculosis is high when we remember that this is a Rural District, where the sufferers from this disease ought to be able to get plenty of fresh air and sunshine, both so essential in the treatment of consumption.

As you are well aware, this subject is now engrossing a good deal of attention, and I think that it is our duty to attempt something towards the mitigation of this disease.

How far notification, either compulsory or voluntary, would affect this question is at present difficult to judge, although it is being tried in a good many districts. Personally, I think it would be a step in the right direction, and one that would not entail a very heavy expenditure.

Consumptive patients in private houses do not as a rule take sufficient care in the disinfection of their sputa, which is now recognised as being one of the chief factors in the spread of the disease.

The supply of milk, also, is a very important question. Not only does milk convey the germs of Enteric Fever, Scarlet Fever, and Diphtheria, but also those of Tuberculosis. It may also be further infected with these latter germs from the cow itself, and therefore any steps that may be taken towards the ensuring of a pure milk supply must have a beneficial influence on tuberculosis and on the health of the District generally.

Your Inspector and myself have during the year inspected several dairies in the District; and I feel it my duty to bring to your consideration the advisability of adopting some regulations with respect to dairies, cow-sheds, and milk shops.

Vital Statistics The total number of deaths in the District, including 11 persons dying in the Union Workhouse but belonging to the District, was 261, equal to an annual death rate of 16·3 per 1,000 population. The number of deaths occurring in children below one year of age was 55, giving an infantile mortality of 139·2 per 1,000 births.

The total number of births registered was 395, giving a birth rate of 24·6 per 1,000 population.

The following Table will compare the Births and Deaths for the last few years :—

Year.	Births.	Birth Rate per 1000 Population.	Deaths.	Death Rate per 1000 Population.	Increase of Births over Deaths.	Infant Mortality under 1 year.	Rate per 1000 Births.
1892	446	27·8	302	19·06	144	...	...
1893	490	30·6	243	18·03	247	59	122·0
1895	434	27·1	274	17·09	162	61	140·5
1896	408	25·5	230	14·50	170	46	112·7
1897	436	17·2	284	16·5	152	84	192·06
1898	385	21·2	223	13·9	162	62	163·1
1899	395	24·6	261	16·3	134	55	139·2

Zymotic Death Rate The death rate from Zymotic Diseases is very small, and the following Table will show the number and the causes to which they were due, and will also compare with the number of deaths in previous years.

TABLE D.

Year.	NOTIFIABLE INFECTIOUS DISEASES.						OTHER INFECTIOUS DISEASES (Not Notifiable).			
	Scarlet Fever.	Typhoid	Diph- theria.	Erysipelas.	Puerperal.	Total.	Whooping Cough.	Measles	Phthisis.	Total.
1896	2	2	4	0	1	9	1	1	16	18
1897	0	2	4	1	1	8	5	1	23	29
1898	1	0	6	0	0	7	13	1	14	28
1899	1	2	2	0	0	5	4	1	21	26

The last Table will show the mortality and various causes of death arranged from the returns of the sub-registars of this District.

TABLE E.

District.	MORTALITY. Years.							VARIOUS CAUSES OF DEATH.												
	Under 1.	Under 5.	Under 15.	Under 25.	Under 65.	Over 65.	Total.	Scarlatina.	Diphtheria.	Croup.	Typhoid.	Measles.	Whooping cough.	Phthisis.	Other Pulmonary.	Heart Diseases.	Cancer.	Injuries.	All other Diseases.	Total.
Downham	18	8	3	3	24	27	83	1	2	1	...	...	...	4	14	7	10	10	34	83
Wiggenhall	24	8	4	6	23	39	104	...	...	...	1	...	4	13	6	14	8	3	55	104
Fincham	13	2	2	0	20	26	63	...	...	...	1	1	...	4	11	2	7	1	36	63
Union	...	...	...	...	...	...	11	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Total	55	18	9	9	67	92	261	1	2	1	2	1	4	21	31	23	25	14	125	250

In conclusion, I have to thank you for the support which you are always so ready to accord me.

I have the honour to remain, Gentlemen,

Your obedient Servant,

GEO. FREDK. CROSS,

Medical Officer of Health.

